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ABSTRACT

A psychiatrist discusses ways to help children who are failing in school, the reasons behind their failure and the self perpetuating nature of failure. Teacher attitudes, the grading system, and the educational process itself are listed as three areas requiring change if failing students are to be helped. (CK)

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This publication is based on an address by Dr. Glasser at the 1969 Annual Meeting of the National Association of Elementary School Principals, NEA, in Las Vegas, Nevada.

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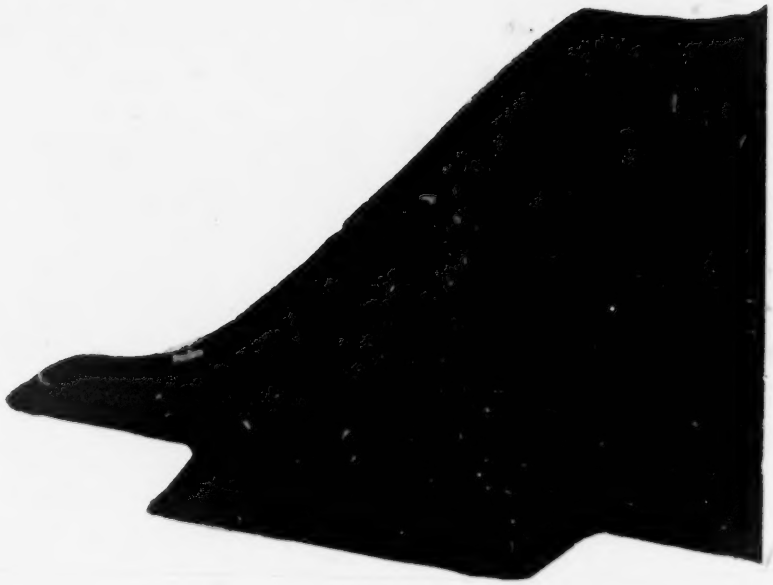


BY profession, I'm a psychiatrist. But I've become concerned and interested in education because I have had many contacts with educators. Many of these educators are complaining that they have a lot of kids in their schools who are hard to get along with. In desperation they will even ask a psychiatrist to come in and see if he can do anything about it. So, at this time, I consider myself a psychiatrist who is desperately trying to become a school teacher in order to help all the school teachers who are trying to become psychiatrists.

My background in education is, of course, extensive. I went to school 27 years. I haven't been a teacher very long, but I've spent a long time in the classroom. And the only really good educational experience I had in those entire 27 years was in medical school at Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. The philosophy and many of the ideas in my book, *Schools Without Failure*, are patterned after the kind of education I received at that medical school.

That school was quite a revelation to me. I thought going to medical school was really going to be rough. People had warned me about the crusty old professors and how they make life hard for you. But it wasn't that way at all. On the first day we were there, the dean spoke to us. We didn't believe him, but this is what he said:

"We selected you to become doctors, and everybody in this room is going to be a doctor. We hope you enjoy your four years. You are all going to make it. There's no problem. Don't worry about anything. Just relax and learn a lot and that's it."

"Well," we said, "this is a prelude to a miserable four years," because we had learned in school that when anyone speaks that way, he usually means something else. But we were wrong. For four years, our professors insisted that we really couldn't fail in this school, that there weren't going to be

any silly, difficult, or tricky tests. They didn't want to spend a lot of time testing us and evaluating us; they wanted to associate with us as human beings. Moreover, they said to us continually something that is rare in any school: "You are the most important thing in this school—you, the student."

After I completed my psychiatric residency, I went to the Ventura School for Girls, which is a California school for older adolescent, delinquent girls. The 400 most delinquent girls in the state are put into this school, and we worked with them to help them try to rehabilitate themselves. Over the 11 years I was there, one of the things the girls said frequently was: "Dr. Glasser, we always failed in school." And they *had* failed, starting very early in school. They said, "It was usually in elementary school that we began to feel we weren't really wanted by the people there, and we didn't do very well." They admitted quite honestly that they did lots of things that made the people in the school *not* want them; they certainly cooperated in that way. Nevertheless, their feeling about school was that it wasn't a very good place, that they weren't going to make it there, that they weren't cared for by the teachers and in turn they didn't care much for them. They cut school frequently and felt that everybody was happier when they did.

When these girls came to the Ventura School, they just couldn't cut school anymore. We also had another strong advantage: We could say honestly to the girls, "You can't flunk out of this school; there's no place else we can send you. If you want to give us a hard time and make everybody miserable, then, of course, you are free to do so. We can't stop it. But, really, since we can't send you anywhere, it's foolish. You are just making life hard for yourself, also."

Sometimes the girls would say, "You know, this isn't a bad school," I would ask, "Why?" And they would say, "Well, you don't fail here. Whatever you do, whether you do well or do poorly, you don't fail. And if you do poorly, they give you time to catch up." In a sense, our school had to start every week because girls entered 52 weeks a year, so we didn't have the distinct semesters and time spans that hamper public schools. The girls started, they progressed, they worked, and that was it.

Gradually, I came into the public schools. I started to work first in a small community school district just south of Los Angeles, and then finally in the Los Angeles city schools. I was brought into the schools because so many of the kids were having so many problems and because I had some reputation for being able to help children who behaved badly.

The first thing I noticed was that the situation in the public schools was a lot rougher than in the school for delinquent girls. It was much, much rougher. There was no way you could keep your finger on some of those kids; they were vibrating all over the building. It was a really difficult situation, and I became very frightened. Like anyone else who is frightened and feels inadequate about the problem he is faced with, I started to hunt for excuses for my ineffectiveness. And one of the excuses I gave was this: "You've got some things inherent in your school that are doing very, very bad things to the kids. There are some things, within the very educational process itself, that aren't very good." School people don't like to hear this, and they kept asking, "What are they?" I said, "Well you're giving a lot of these kids a very difficult time, and their reaction is quite normal. They don't know what to do, so they start fighting back."

And then I would ask: "Why are you failing all these kids?" Every child they brought in to see me was failing in school. And it seemed to me that the kids *weren't* really doing as much as they should. But they were labeled as

failures, and they were behaving the way failures behave. At school, we *really* label children failures. We throw a report card at a child and we say, "Kid, you flunked! Take this report home to your parents and let them verify what a miserable student you are. We may even hold you back in school or put you in a special class with a bunch of kids like yourself."

I worked in some of those classes. I never saw anything like them in my life. They locked those kids in the room with the teacher; otherwise, they would have run right out the door. No human being can teach in such a situation.

This is a serious problem, and I have been trying to do something about it for the last two or three years. Just think, in our elementary schools we have a lot of little kids who are convinced that they are failures—convinced by the time they are seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven years old. Who convinces them?

Let me tell you a story. I was working with a group of about 30 teachers a couple of years ago in the Los Angeles city schools. I was talking about the idea that maybe we shouldn't fail anyone, and the teachers were listening rather haphazardly. The idea struck them as funny. Finally, one teacher couldn't contain herself any longer, and she said, "Dr. Glasser, you've got to fail a few kids." I said, "What grade do you teach?" She said, "First grade." Those little, beady-eyed kids, about two feet off the ground—she's teaching them, and she says you have to fail them!

I said, "Well, does it help the children to fail them?"

"No, oh no, it makes them feel miserable."

So then I said, "You've got a principal, a real tough principal, who says, 'Look, you have to fail some kids to keep up the school's standards.' "

"No, my principal's not that way at all. It would be fine with him if I passed everyone."

"Then, you are doing it for his parents. He has the kind of parents who really want to know if they have a failure early in his life, so they can prepare for it." Six years old!

"No," she said, "the parents aren't like that."

By this time I had run out of reasons, so I said, "Well, you're doing it for America. You think it's good for the country."

She didn't understand this, and there wasn't anything more I could do then. She was convinced that if you have 30 kids in a class, you fail three or four of them every semester. It's hard, it's very hard, on those who fail. Yet, this is the kind of philosophy that seems to prevail in our schools: that somehow or other we can teach children how to succeed by failing them.

This is the philosophy I am trying to change—the philosophy, inherent in much of our education, that if you fail a child it will cause him to buckle down and work hard; it will make a new man of him. Unfortunately, it just doesn't work that way. Most of us by this time know that all you learn from failing is how to fail. And in our schools we are teaching many, many children how to fail. If a child has had four or five years of solid failure by the time he's ten or eleven years old, he has figured out his relationship to school and it isn't good. He says, in effect, "From what I understand of success in this school, I am not going to succeed. I am not going to have any *chance* to succeed."

This is what I am trying to counteract. To explain this more thoroughly, I would like to go through some of the basic concepts of Reality Therapy that relate to this particular problem. Let's examine briefly how people function—adults, kids, everybody. How do we function in this world? What is the psychological basis for the way we behave? Let's imagine that I have a blackboard here, and in the middle of the blackboard I have written the word "identity." Then imagine that, above and below the word "identity," I have drawn some lines to designate a wall. And the only thing that goes through the wall is the word "identity." Above and below it is a solid wall.

From that basic beginning I think we can explain how people function. Identity is the basic human need. All of us, no matter who we are, have this basic need to identify ourselves as somebody, as a separate, unique, distinct human being. Call it our self-image, our self-concept, or whatever you wish. There is nothing complicated about this. It's *me* in distinction to *you*, and *you* in distinction to *me*. From the time we are born until the time we die, we struggle to gain and to maintain for ourselves this feeling as an identified person. We are somebody.

The way in which we identify ourselves is critical. All of us have to have an identity. Some of us are able to gain and to maintain a success identity. We feel that we are successful. Others, a large percentage of them—many with whom you are concerned in your school—identify themselves quite differently: "I am not successful; I am failing; I am a failure." And that wall, which was drawn above and below the word "identity," separates those two large groups of people—those on one side who are successful, and those on the other side who are failures. When we go into one of our rooms at school, we are quite able to discover for ourselves—by observation in most cases—the students who are succeeding and those who are failing. Look at any class and you begin to see, right there in the early grades—sometimes even in kindergarten, although it usually isn't apparent until after kindergarten—some who are succeeding and some who are failing.

We spend a great deal of time, and a lot of money along with the time, identifying those who are succeeding and those who are failing. In my business—psychiatry, psychology—we have

become experts at identifying those people. We have counselors and guidance people and people to give tests. A teacher brings in a child and says, "He isn't doing well." The counselor tests him and says, "That's right. He isn't doing very well." This kind of meaningless dialogue goes on—as if when you give the child an official label that he is not doing well it makes any difference. When the counselor tests—and it matters little what he tests—he looks for a label and pins it on the child, and the label is usually some euphemism for failure.

Actually, it's not important for us to spend a great deal of time evaluating other people. This really isn't necessary. What's very, very necessary is that we spend time evaluating ourselves, and that we set up our schools so that children can spend a great deal of time evaluating *themselves*. In the end, this is what counts. It's not what other people say of you that's terribly important; it's your impression of yourself, relative to others and to everything else.

Tonight, before you go to bed, take just five minutes and say, "Let me look into my life up to this moment and ask myself: 'Am I making it? Am I going some place? Am I succeeding? Am I doing what I think is right, what is good?' " Most of the people here would come up with something like this: "In the things I am trying to do, certainly I am not doing my very best, and there are a lot of times when I have doubts, but *generally*, the algebraic sum and substance of all of my life is that I am succeeding." Your identification would be, "I am a success."

If we were to examine how you arrived at that identification, we would find that you followed two basic pathways—which I call success-need pathways—that led you to be able to make that identification of yourself. The upper pathway leading to identity is the pathway of love. Practically everyone whose identity is success has someone who cares for him, someone who loves him. Equally important, he has an ability himself to care for someone else. Also, if we are on the success pathway, we believe that what we are doing in the world is worthwhile and we have some confidence that others in the world also believe that what we are doing is worthwhile—not everybody and not all the time, but *generally*.

When we examine the children who are not doing well in our school, we usually find that they are unable, in the school situation—and I stress *school*, not other places in their lives, because we don't have much jurisdiction over those other places—to discover the fact that they can care for someone and that others care for them, the fact that they can do something worthwhile themselves and in terms of what others believe is worthwhile also. These pathways are critical. The entire educational program, no matter how we analyze it and separate it and organize it, has to follow these pathways so that the child, when in school, can identify himself as a success. If he can't follow these pathways, then he is forced to find other pathways because he must have an identity; that's basic. He has no choice in this; he has to have an identity. And if he can't find a success identity, he will follow pathways that lead to a failure identity; he doesn't just flounder in the middle. All of us are on one side of this wall or the other, whether it's in our schools, our community, our country, or other parts of the world.

Let's look at the students on the other side of the wall, those who would evaluate themselves and come up with, "I'm not making it." What *we* may think of them makes very little difference; this is how they regard themselves. Moreover, people who feel they are failures have a failure identity and they behave as failures. The way they behave is in contrast to the behavior of those who follow the pathways of love and of gaining self-worth. They follow failure

pathways that solidify their failure identity. Their behavior is antisocial, and it can be serious or it can be mild. But these children identify themselves as failures, and, to solidify themselves as failures, they say, "I'm going to be antagonistic and go against the regulations of this school." They don't do it haphazardly. They do it because they need to keep fulfilling this identity, to keep saying, "At least, I'm *someone*; at least, I'm a *failure*. And as a failure, I'll say 'to hell with everybody else; I'll do what I want to do at any time.' "

The students with whom you are having difficulty, the ones who act out in your schools are doing this because of their basic identity of themselves. And you cannot stop this unless you can help them toward a successful identification. As long as they feel failure, anything that you try to do with them or to them or for them will be futile. They will continue to follow the pathway of delinquency or the pathway of withdrawal, which is the other route. Many children do not wish to be delinquent. They don't want to hassle you or anybody else. They say, "I'll just quietly check out of this situation." And they withdraw. You see this perhaps most acutely if you go into your local high school and walk down the corridor where the doors are open. You see—more so than in your elementary school—a few students in the front, clustered around the teacher, participating; a middle group who are semi-with-it; and a whole group in the back—about half of the class—totally and utterly out of it in terms of the educational procedure. In this group, some of them are delinquent, of course, but only a few. If many of them were really delinquent, the high school would be in grave trouble. However, students don't take the delinquent course very often; they take the withdrawal course. They play it cool, and they have a tacit understanding with the teacher, "You don't hassle me; I won't hassle you." Most

teachers are quite ready to accept this kind of agreement.

So we have two pathways—the pathway of delinquency and the pathway of withdrawal—that confirm the failure identity. And you say to yourself, "Why is this? Why do people go this way? There's an opportunity in our school for everyone." Most of you come from good schools where, if a student wants to buckle down and learn, there is an opportunity. Why, then, are these students failing? What's wrong? Why don't they try hard and work hard and develop some worthwhile association with the teacher and other students in a meaningful, friendly kind of way? Why do some of them go in this other direction?

One thing I hear continually from the teachers in the Watts schools where I work is, "It's hard to teach these kids because they come from inadequate homes." I refuse to accept this. I have to listen to it, I suppose, but I try not to. I ask, "What's the difference what kind of home they come from?" And the teachers say, "Well, they haven't taught them anything at home." That may be true, but what has this to do with school? I think the first thing we have to do is get over the idea that you have to take the whole child into account. You are much better off to take the child as he comes to school, teach him there, and not worry about the kind of home he comes from. Be willing to say, "At least for the six or seven hours a day he's in *my* school, we are going to care for him, and we are going to see that he learns something worthwhile." If he's not doing well, we're not going to cop out and say, "Well, he comes from a bad home." That's not the way to help a child. Our job is not to get that concerned about the kind of home a child comes from. Our big responsibility is to see that the child succeeds while he's in school and to develop a program that makes it possible for him to succeed.

If we were to examine why some children succeed and others don't, we would find that there is one basic psychological difference. It is a very important difference, and it operates in school and everywhere else. Private patients who come to me in my office in West Los Angeles have exactly the same problem as the children who are failing in school. They are lonely.

The people who are succeeding in our world are able to become involved with other human beings in responsible relationships. They have human involvement in their lives; they have people. In contrast with those who are meaningfully involved with others in a good relationship -- friendly, warm, learning together, caring for each other —we have large numbers of people in our world and many, many students in our schools whose basic psychological problem is that they are *lonely*. That's the reason why they follow the pathways of delinquency and withdrawal.

You don't see "lonely" written in many psychology books. "Lonely" is a gut word, and "lonely" can happen to you and it can happen to me. So the people who are in charge of things don't like to use this word. They like to use other words that are much less sensitizing to us, words like *alienated, isolated, culturally deprived, disadvantaged*. Well, anyone who is lonely is alienated, isolated, disadvantaged, culturally deprived, but his basic problem is that he is lonely and he needs to gain a relationship with somebody else. The pathways of love and worthwhileness are closed to lonely people. All that the lonely one can do is follow the pathway of antagonism and the pathway of withdrawal. In his loneliness, he checks out or he fights back. People who are lonely are in a constant state of pain. Everyone has been lonely at some time in his life. All of us have felt the pain of loneliness. This is a lot different from *wanting* to be alone. When you want to get away from it all and be alone, you can do it because you know

you can come back. Nobody voluntarily goes in a direction to be lonely. Nobody does this. The person who is lonely is lonely because he can't figure out what to do that's different from being alone. In our schools, we have little children—six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven years of age who are terribly lonely. Many of these lonely students are failing, and many more will fail later.

Basic, then, to the whole process of education is what this conference is about—effecting human involvement as a major part of the educational procedure. Without that, there isn't any education; without that, there has to be failure. The theory behind Reality Therapy is the absolute necessity to provide a warm and human environment in our schools, the kind of environment that makes a kid get up in the morning and say, "I want to go to school. I'm looking forward to it. I have a nice teacher. I care about that teacher, and she cares about me. And I like the other kids, and they care about me, too." If a child doesn't feel that way, we who run the educational establishments are failing him. And we *can* run schools that kids feel good about; it's not that hard to do. It doesn't even cost any more money. But it does require us to develop our capacities to deal with little children as human beings, not as vessels to be filled full of knowledge. They'll get plenty of knowledge if we are warm and friendly with them, if we see children as people who have to learn to relate with others. Our schools have to become reservoirs of social responsibility, where people care for each other.

I wish we had a group of kindergarten kids in front of us this morning. I wouldn't care whether they were from a school in the heart of a large city or from a suburban school that, at least on the surface, seems to be functioning much better than the inner-city schools. If we had these little kindergarten kids here, I would ask them, as I often do, "Do you like your teacher?" Every little hand would be up in the air. Then I would ask, "Do you love your teacher?" Still every hand would be up in the air. They would be eager; they would be flocking around me. Even mentioning the fact that they loved their teacher would make them happy. Then I would ask, "Does your teacher love you?" Maybe I would even ask it in a gruff voice. But I couldn't fool them at all, those little kindergarten kids. They *know* their teacher loves them; no doubt about it in their minds. They would raise their hands; they would look at their teacher for verification; she would smile at them. A very happy, loving thing, those kindergarten classes.

Then I would like to dismiss the kindergartners and bring in an eleventh-grade history class. I'd have the students grouped in a circle, and I'd ask them the same question. I would say, "Do you love your teacher?" They'd look at me, you know, rather peculiarly, and they'd say, "Love our teacher?"

"Yes, do you love your teacher?"

They'd say, "Man, she's a *school teacher!*"

Then I would ask, "Does your teacher love you?"

And they'd say, "Where you from?"

This would be a much different experience from the one with the little kindergartners. Of course we could say, "Well, kindergartners come from different kinds of homes. They come from good homes, and eleventh graders come from bad homes." But this probably isn't true. The eleventh graders come from homes that may be economically a little better, but there isn't that much difference. What's different is what has happened to the eleventh graders since they were kindergartners. And a lot of what's happened to them has happened in an educational institution.

To get a more honest response from the high school students, we should take the eleventh graders individually and say, "Look—we don't have any group pressure now—do you really care for

this teacher?" Many of them would say that they did, they cared very much for her. And many of them would say the teacher cared for them, too. They could say this because the group pressure would be gone. But still the number of students in the eleventh grade who cared for the teacher and felt the presence of human involvement would greatly diminish. Some of this is a natural dropoff, but the dropoff is too great. We have to be concerned with it, concerned with the fact that children past a certain age no longer feel humanly and warmly involved in school, and we have to develop techniques to keep the humanness and the warmth.

Now let's go through the basic steps of how you can get kids involved, keep them involved, and keep them away from failure. We spend a lot of time and effort trying to help the students who are failing, trying to get them over on the success side. This is hard to do, and what we do is haphazard. It's much more important, I believe, to work very hard—and that's why elementary school is so critical—to see that children never get over on the failure side in the first place, to keep them on the success side. And the steps I am going to go through now are the steps to keep them on the success side.

We talk a lot about motivation. We say it's hard to work with these kids; they're not motivated. Motivation is a bad term and we should try to get rid of it. We can't directly motivate anybody. We have illusions that we can; we even try to motivate kids directly through bribes and punishment and rewards. But these things work very poorly. You can motivate people with a gun—point a gun at them, and they get highly motivated. However, it works only as long as you are pointing the gun and as long as they know you'll shoot. As soon as they have any doubts, they won't be motivated by the gun.

Let's forget the word *motivation* and get back to this word *involvement*. People who are involved become motivated; involvement is the basis of motivation. In this world, we do things because we care for others and we care for ourselves in relationship to these others. It is a rare person who will work all alone to struggle and produce something. We need the confirmation and verification of others. We are a social people, and we are all dependent upon one another. The only independent people in this world are in the back wards of state hospitals. Everybody else needs people desperately.

If we need each other this much (and we do), what steps can we take to get involved positively with other people? *The first step*, obviously, is to be warm and personal and friendly. You have to be emotionally involved with those with whom you work and those with whom you teach. This is a necessity. Unfortunately, my profession—psychiatry, psychology—has promoted a false philosophy: *non-involvement*. And some of that philosophy has leaped over into the field of education. You should push it back at once because it is a worthless philosophy. If you're a psychiatrist, for example, you are not supposed to get emotionally involved with your patients. This is a very hard thing to tell somebody who comes to you for help. The man is lonely and miserable; he comes for help and he's paying a lot of money—and traditional psychiatry says you should not get emotionally involved with him.

However, we have to become emotionally involved to some degree. Emotionally involved does not mean emotionally entangled; it doesn't mean we become so involved that we don't know whether we are working realistically or not. But the feeling that I care for you and you care for me has to be there, and it has to be there in school. When people say that a good teacher doesn't get emotionally involved with the students, they don't know what they are talking about. Don't listen to them. Teachers *have* to get involved with students; it's critical for the whole pro-

cedure. Teachers have to care for children, and they have to show that they care.

The reason that people don't want to get involved is that they fear they will get hurt when they get involved. There's no doubt about it: As long as you stay aloof, as long as there are just little numbers out there, just little faces that you don't really see, you can't get hurt. They're just your students, that's all. You "teach" them during the day, go home at night, and that's it. But if you are concerned about them and you are involved, they can really hurt you. At the same time, involvement is the only way you can really teach them and, equally important, learn from them. Thus, we have to suspend our fear of getting hurt, and get involved with the children. We have to be personal and warm; otherwise nothing will happen.

Besides being warm and personal, we have to deal with children as they are now (step two), deal with their present history, what's going on today. Unfortunately, all human beings seem to have an innate desire to be historians. All of us, really, are practicing historians – especially administrators; they seem to be the most numerous practicing historians we have. When a child in trouble comes to the office, you don't say, "Okay, kid, what's going on?" You say, "Here you are, the 13th time this semester you've been in the office." The little kid begins to smile to himself and say, "Well, he's starting to know me. I need *someone*. I guess I'll have him, if nobody else." The kid would be disappointed if you didn't give him credit for being there 13 times. You keep right on being a historian, and you say, "And 10 of them are for the same thing; you're doing the same thing over and over again. Now look at that. In September you did it; in October you did it; in November you did it; and here it is April and you're still doing it." And the kid says to himself, "I'm making points; I'm making points. This guy is beginning to understand what I'm really doing here in this school."

The child is behaving on the failure side of the fence, but he's establishing his identity. If I were to say to any one of you suddenly—one of those free association tests—"Name a kid," you'd name one all right, and he wouldn't be from the successful side of the fence, I guarantee you. In one school where I used to work, I would say, "Name a kid," and they would say "Leroy!" immediately because Leroy had established his identity with all the teachers in the school. His name struck terror in the hearts of the new teachers. And when the wonderful Catholic nuns in the nearby parochial school took Leroy away to their school, I think they converted more people to Catholicism than they could have done by any other means. The Leroys can make points all right, but we must not allow them to do this, to identify themselves in this negative way. We have to have the strength not to be historians but to deal with each instance of difficulty in a way that says, "This is all that really is important now." And it is; we can't do anything about the past anyway.

Let me give you another example, one from your own life. Let's say that many of you men are here by yourselves. Your wives had to stay home with the children. You come home from this little sojourn in Las Vegas and your wife says, "Honey, I've got some news for you. Unfortunately, I smashed up the car. Not bad, just wrinkled a few of the fenders." At that particular point, you will all become historians. It is a rare person who will say, "Okay, we'll get it fixed; that's the way it goes." Most of you will say, "That's the *fourth* time this year!" And at this point, your wife, who is quite capable of defending herself, will retaliate with a little bit of your history, and as a result of this historical interaction between you, there will be much coolness for many weeks.

The same thing happens with your students. If we are going to develop

any kind of warmth or personal feeling between us, we will have to suspend history and say, "Okay, let's deal with what's going on now." This will prevent children from going to the failing side of the fence or, if they already are on that side of the fence, this will help us get them back. Children have had much experience with historians, and they're prepared for this approach. If you don't use it, they will say to themselves, "Gee, he's not talking about all the stuff that I thought he would." The kid's disappointed. You didn't say he kicked the ball across the playground 43 times this semester. You just said, "What did you do?" This disarms the child, especially the little ones.

"What did you do?" That's all you need to say—nothing else. You don't have to find a long string of things to talk about; you don't have to go any further than this. With little children, this works pretty well. They say to themselves, "Holy smoke, he's asking me what I did!" Then he will begin to think. Because little kids are basically responsible, he'll think, "Well, I guess I must be responsible for what I did. He's asking what I did. He's not saying *you* did it; this is the *38th time you did it*. He's not saying you're no good because you did it. He's just saying 'What did you do?' " This gives the child a new outlook, and he says, "Well, I'll come over to his side. He's approaching me as a worthwhile person."

' What did you do?" Why don't you try this simple approach when you get back to your school?

The third step which leads to involvement is to refrain from another natural human tendency which is to be not only a historian but also a preacher, moralizing and preaching all the way through the "history." "That's sinful, the way you behave. And I'll make a value judgment that you are going down the drain." We have to refrain from this. What we have to do is to try to get the child to become his own preacher. This gets to the basis of what we are trying to do in Reality Therapy in working with people. If you can deal with the present problem, get it out here on the table, then you can say to the child, "*Is what you are doing helping you?*"

I haven't stressed feelings very much because feelings are just part of the process. Feelings accompany behavior. As behavior becomes more responsible, better feelings will accompany it. When behavior is irresponsible, when it's delinquent or withdrawn, then you have bad feelings and pain along with it. But you can't work with the feelings. When a child is crying and upset and miserable, you have to let him sit there until he calms down. Then you can ask him, "Is what you're doing helping you?" Get him to make a value judgment of his own behavior. If he can do that, if he can make a value judgment of his own behavior, he is on the road to becoming more responsible. But don't you make the value judgment. The child has little dials in his head, and he turns them right off when you say, "All right, kid, you're no good." He doesn't want to hear it; it doesn't make any difference; he's heard it a thousand times before. But you can get a lot of attention from many kids by asking, "Is what you are doing helping you, really?" Suppose this little ten-year-old is cutting school, not coming regularly at all, and you say, "Look, is it helping you, staying home from school?" You have to be tough about it, and this is hard with little children, but it's important.

"Well," he says, "I don't think school's any good. It's not helping me to come here."

And then you say, "Okay, that's it. Good-by." This is also very hard to do, almost impossible, but you have to let him take the responsibility for his own decision. He won't want this responsibility. He will expect you to preach at him, beg him to come to school, tell him he won't get a good job unless he makes the fifth grade. Don't do it. Say, "Well, look, we have a school here, and if you think it isn't helping you,

maybe you ought to go home for a few days." He won't like this at all. You destroy his whole identity as a failure when you put it that way. Then he has to start living by his values, and he almost never wants to.

You have to be tough enough to let children make their own decisions. Fortunately, for your sake, in elementary school most of them make the correct decision. When they get to high school, it's a little trickier. But when they are in elementary school, most of the kids will decide that what they are doing is not helping them or anybody else very much. And if you let them make the decision, they'll decide to come to school.

Then you have to go to the next step. The child is not cutting school now, but let's say he's upsetting the class and the teacher sends him to the office. Be warm and friendly, let him sit there and cool down, and then say to him, "What have you been doing in class?" And he tells you. He usually tells the truth; he's rather proud of it.

"Is it helping you?"

He's not used to that question. He'll think about it and probably say, "No, it's not helping me, but it's what I do."

And you say, "Do you want to keep doing this kind of thing? Is this the way you want to behave in class?" And he'll say, "No, I guess I'd like to do better, but. . . ." Then he'll give you a few "buts," and you listen to the buts—up to a point. You continually stress the fact that it is possible for him to do better.

If he decides he can do better, you go to the next step (step four)—you work out a plan with the child. The plan *must* follow the two success pathways. It has to lead the child toward becoming more worthwhile; it has to lead him toward becoming more involved with responsible people in a warm, friendly way. And remember this: If the child has said, "Look, I want to do better," and you can't come up with any kind of plan for him to follow these two pathways, then the ball game is over right there. But in 99.99 percent of the cases, especially in elementary school, you *can* come up with a plan. Some kind of plan *has* to be made. You can't go back to just what was before, because that wasn't working. Take time, work with the teacher, and come up with some kind of plan so that this child will succeed in school. Then get a commitment from the child to follow the plan.

That's step five—the child's commitment to follow the plan. Get it in writing; there's nothing wrong with writing. Get a contract made out that says what he is going to do, and let him sign it. You keep a copy—on your desk, on the wall, on a commitment board. You can't emphasize this too much; kids love these commitments. Commitment is what makes the whole thing really viable. Commitment is what seals the involvement. Without it there is no real involvement.

Now, there are two snags in this procedure. One of them is that many children don't follow through on the plan; commitment means nothing to them. So we have two more steps to take, and both of them require toughness. You have to be tough in this business. People can be warm and friendly and loving and involved, but that doesn't mean you have to be easy or permissive. Toughness is part of the procedure.

Step six, then: You have to be tough enough not to excuse any behavior that the child has already said was bad for him. He made a value judgment that his behavior was not good for him or anyone else, and you have to be careful not to accept any excuses whatsoever for his continuing that behavior. This takes real toughness, because our whole world is founded on excuses. Not long ago, in a class discussion, we were talking about lying, and a sixth-grade girl in the group was using lies as an excuse for things. She said, "Dr. Glasser, if I stopped lying my whole world

would collapse." We have to be tough enough not to take excuses. If the child said he was going to behave in certain ways, you just ask, "What did you do? What's your judgment now? What's your plan now?" Go through the whole procedure again if you need to, but don't accept any excuses.

Excuses break the involvement; they always undercut the responsible behavior. If you want to help children become responsible, don't accept excuses. It doesn't make any difference whether excuses are valid or invalid. Excuses are all the same; don't take any of them. If we could only get rid of excused absences in our schools, it would give even parents a chance to be responsible. You should be able to say to parents: "Send your child to school; we want to teach him. If he is not here, we will assume there is a good reason." And you'd have as many children, probably more, in school.

The last step, step number seven, is where I always lose my audience. That's why I hold it for the last point. *Don't use any punishment whatsoever.* This is where I really get grumblings and moanings: "How can you deal with these kids if you don't whack them around a little bit?" And believe me, there are plenty of kids who get whacked around. The kids rather like it; it gets them off the hook, and everything is kind of nice afterwards. They get even by vandalizing your school over the weekend.

I advocate very strongly, *no punishment.* This doesn't mean that I'm permissive; it doesn't mean that I am advocating giving up rules or regulations or discipline. I am just saying, *don't be punitive.* I define punitive as causing children pain for certain kinds of behavior—physical or mental pain. Punitive means hitting them; it means ridiculing them, using sarcasm, downing them, or any of the punitive things that we do. And, incidentally, downing a child is worse than hitting him. Don't

do any of these things: they won't work. If you have a child that is absolutely out of control in your school, you may have to send him home: you may have to suspend him from school. I don't consider this punishment. If you follow the steps I'm talking about, you'll say to the child, "We want you in school. But we haven't been able to figure out, you and I, how you can behave so you can remain. So go home and think about it for a day. Come back tomorrow, and we'll try again." This is not punitive. Have rules and regulations—whatever you think is fair and your community will stand for or wants to have. But don't have any rules and regulations that you don't enforce. That's always a very bad thing. It's one of the reasons why our teen-agers are in such trouble. We have a whole bunch of laws that are foolish, and we don't enforce them because we all recognize their foolishness. We should have only laws that mean something; then we should enforce them and make sure that they do mean something.

To explain this matter of punishment more clearly, let's take an illustration. Suppose you live in Los Angeles and you drove to Las Vegas for this meeting. It's a pretty good highway and on the way back, around about Bakersfield, you are moving along at ninety miles an hour. The highway patrolman pulls you over, and he says, "Look, you are going ninety, and it's been my experience that people who go ninety get themselves killed in large quantities. I'm going to give you a ticket." You knew you were going ninety, or if you didn't know you were going ninety you knew you were exceeding the speed limit a little bit. The policeman is courteous. He gives you a ticket; you accept the ticket. If you are success-oriented, this will probably be a fairly effective warning for you to slow down. This is no punishment, in a certain sense. You broke a rule, and he is saying you will have to pay the small consequence in order to learn to heed the rule. That's all he is doing.

But suppose that after he gives you a ticket, he pulls out his service revolver and puts a hole through your accelerator foot. Pow! "It has also been my experience," he says, "that people with a sore right foot don't press the gas pedal so hard." This will make you very angry and upset. You will consider this to be excessive, and many people would consider it to be punitive even though the patrolman says, "I'm just trying to help you." It doesn't help you, and it doesn't make a better man of you. You get upset and antagonistic.

Well, when we put holes through our little children's feet, we fail them, and we get antagonism and nothing else. To exclude them from school or from class for a time until they can make a better decision, that's one thing. To be extra punitive, to be in any way mean and nasty, to pour sarcasm and criticism and ridicule on a child—all of these things are unnecessary. They don't help anybody, and they break the involvement that you are trying desperately to make. The child won't be angry with you if you say, "Look, I guess we can't make it in class for a couple of hours. Maybe you'd better stay out for a while. You figure something out, and we'll get you back in." But he'll be angry with you if you are punitive, if you separate yourself from him through some kind of punitive action.

NOW let us look at what failure means to a child. When a child feels failure, he doesn't just feel failure here, there, or some place else; it pervades his whole system. Ask a child, and I've asked plenty of them in the schools where I work, "What happens when you get a low grade on your report card? What does it mean?" The kids all say, "I'm a bad person." Invariably they say that. When you gave the grade, to you it was just a low grade; but to the child it means that he is a bad person—somebody who is no good. It means failure identity. We have to be very careful about this kind of label. Anything we do that makes a child feel failure causes him to further interpret that feeling of failure as, "I'm not only a failure in school, I'm a failure, period. I'm a bad person."

Let's imagine we had the word "education" written on a blackboard, and let's say we had two lines drawn from the word. This line over here would lead to involvement, and involvement is basic to the whole procedure. Some procedures for getting individual involvement were discussed earlier. But we have to figure out more ways to get children involved.

I have one major suggestion. The suggestion is to inaugurate the procedure in your school of having systematic-type class meetings in which teachers meet with their students in a nonjudgmental way for the very simple purpose of listening to what the students say. I firmly believe that by getting involvement going, you can change your whole school. Teachers need to learn how to hold these meetings. Many of them don't like the idea at first. It's different, and they've never had any experience with the technique. I demonstrate these meetings over and over again. I estimate that I've had somewhere between fifteen hundred and two thousand meetings in the last five or six years, at Ventura and in the public schools.

For the purpose of these teacher-student meetings, the class should be in a circle. You can't have a meeting unless people are in a circle. I can *lecture* to you like this—you out there in rows and me up here at a lectern. But after I leave you today, that is it. Any other interaction would have to be in a circle where we interact together. I don't understand how people can lecture, week after week, and expect involvement.

You have the class in a circle for the express purpose of getting the teacher to listen to what the children say. Teachers tell me, "The thing that's wrong with all my classes is that the children don't listen." Well, one reason they don't listen—the major reason, I believe—is that the teacher doesn't spend very much time listening to *them*. Or she just listens to a very select few, the hand raisers in the front row—the others are out of it. In a circle, nobody's in the front row or the back row; everybody's the same. In a circle the teacher can listen to the children, and they can listen to each other. This mutual listening is the *basis* of social responsibility in action. This *is* social responsibility in action—the ability to listen and interact with each other, give each other a chance to say what's on their minds, express their own feelings, their own opinions, their own ideas. These meetings or discussions in the schools can be the

basis for getting involvement going, and this involvement can change teachers' personalities drastically. I have seen teachers who were withdrawn become warm and pleasant and friendly after they started these meetings and began to appreciate their students as real little people.

This kind of meeting helps get involvement going, and this *prevents* kids from going over to the failure side. The details of how we conduct these meetings are written up in great detail in my book, and you could start from this basic information. As principals, you are the ones who have to start. Perhaps you can start by going to a teacher you feel will be interested and supportive. Say to this teacher, "Let's have one of these meetings. We heard about it in Las Vegas, and maybe it's a crazy idea but let's try it anyway and see what happens." Don't just have one or two meetings. See what happens in a class when you get a series of meetings going—maybe you have meetings every day for ten, fifteen, or twenty minutes. With 30 such meetings, you can change a class, and it takes about 30 to really get this thing done.

The next thing you have to do is to examine your educational program for relevance. I know *relevance* is an overworked word, but it's a very important word. Education has to be relevant. By *relevant* I mean it has to mean something to the child. Most of the courses in the curriculum mean something, they are relevant; they were included because they are important to a child's education. But what we fail to do in school (and a lot can be accomplished in these circular meetings) is to teach the relevance of what we are teaching. It's not enough to tell a child that we are going to learn about history. We have to teach him *why* we are learning about history—that's the important thing. Then we can motivate him to do some work. We spend far too much time teaching him history and not enough time teaching him why it's important

to learn it. The second part—why it's important to learn the subject—is education. The subject alone is not really education. For example, I had a meeting with some third graders up in Sacramento a few years ago, and before I met with the group the principal said, "Check on relevance," and I said, "Fine."

I decided to check on relevance in the mathematics area, so I said to the kids, "What are you doing in math?"

"We're learning Roman numerals."

I couldn't believe my ears. Roman numerals! Great! "Why are you learning Roman numerals?"

"Because the teacher teaches them." A very good answer!

Next I said, "Why do you think she's teaching them?"

"Because someone tells her to." Again a very good answer.

So I said, "Why do you think the person who tells her to teach Roman numerals thinks they should be taught?"

One little kid said, "Well, I have a set of encyclopedias at home in the basement, and the front covers have Roman numerals on them." All right, that's why.

"How many encyclopedias do you have?"

"Twenty."

"How far are you learning Roman numerals in school?"

"Up to a thousand." (There was a little discrepancy here!)

Another child said, "I have a book with Roman numerals for the chapters." (Same discrepancy; not many books have a thousand chapters.)

So I said, "What are you doing with the Roman numerals?"

"We're adding and subtracting them. And we try to multiply and divide them."

Well, you can't multiply and divide—that was a serious problem of the Roman Empire. But you can add them and subtract them, I suppose. So I said, "Okay, this is fine. Do you have any tests on them?"

"Oh, yes, we've had two tests already, and we're going to have another one."

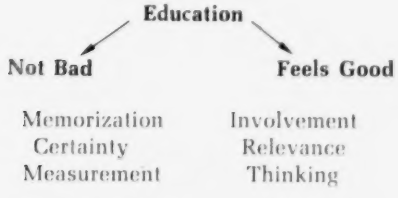
Now, here is where things really went wrong. There's nothing wrong with teaching Roman numerals. I suppose we could figure out that they are relevant to some degree. But to *test* people on Roman numerals, and to *fail* them because they don't know Roman numerals, to give them a failure identity in one important facet in their school program—math—because they don't know Roman numerals, that's *wrong*. Kids shouldn't fail Roman numerals. The Romans failed; that was bad enough. Whatever you teach children, don't evaluate them on anything that is obviously irrelevant. Don't let them begin to identify themselves as failures on irrelevant material.

The kids got nervous after this discussion so I finally ended it. I said, "Well, look here, kids, some day you'll go to Rome. You'll know Roman numerals, and you'll be all set." One little boy raised his hand and said "I spent the whole summer in Rome, Dr. Glasser, and I never saw a Roman numeral."

The next thing that's very important is thinking. Thinking is like being in favor of motherhood and against sin. Every educator says, "We teach thinking." But actually, if you look at the little girls in your local high school who get the A-plus goody-goody grade average and become valedictorians, you will find that most of them didn't get there by thinking. They got there by being sweet and kind—and memorizing.

Thinking is very important, and thinking is antagonistic to memorizing. It is almost impossible for a person who memorizes extensively to be thoughtful; and a person who is thoughtful sees little reason to memorize. Memorization hasn't been necessary since the Gutenberg Press. Prior to that time, it probably was necessary. I write books, and I hope that many people read my books; I hope that nobody memorizes them. Read them, think about them, agree with them or disagree with them, but don't memorize them.

Let's go back to that word "education" and the two lines drawn from it. You go down one line and you see *memorization* written, and you see *certainty* and *measurement* written. On the other side you see involvement, relevance, and thinking—and the important phrase, "feels good." On the memorization side, you see "not bad," because the best feeling you can get out of this kind of education (memorization, certainty, measurement) is "not bad." Anybody who has any sense at all knows it's relatively worthless except that it gets you through grade school and prepares you for more of the same later.



I was arguing with a college faculty one day, and I said, "Your methods of grading and selection are very poor." They said, "Well, we select students with high grades from high school because we find this correlates very highly with what they do in college." I couldn't argue with that; they certainly had a point there. Whether it correlates with higher education is another story, but it correlates very highly with what we now do in college.

Memorization is ridiculous. When my son was in the eleventh grade, he came home one day and said, "Dad, I've got a history final, and guess what it's on."

I said, "I won't guess; you tell me."

"We have to memorize the presidents of the United States in order."

I started laughing, and he said, "What are you laughing about?" I said, "If I weren't laughing, I'd be crying."

He asked me what he should do. Well, I'm a typical parent, so I said, "You memorize the presidents—you want to go to a first-rate university, don't you? Well, I guess that's the kind of information you will have to have to get in." So he memorized the presidents, in order, and he got a B in the course. Later, I said to my son, "Tell your teacher that your father thanks her for this test question because he can use it as an example all over the United States."

"Nothing doing, Dad. I don't want to flunk."

Now the next item is *certainty*. It is very unfortunate that we get so concerned that what we teach in school is *certain* and *correct*. We may wish the world were that way, all neatly ordered, but that's not the way it is. There is no certain one right answer for any of the tough problems that we face—in our personal lives, or our work, or our education, or the world in general. Yet in school we delude students, starting in elementary school, with the idea that there are *answers* to the problems of our life. This is a very bad thing to do, and it raises a group of non-thinking people. Then when they get older and they meet life, they start to react and some of this reaction is the non-thinking violence that we see all over this country. We have to let students know that there are no right answers, and we have to help them see that there are many better alternatives to certainty and "right" answers.

The certainty principle can, unfortunately, be locked into memorization. That history teacher, I am sure, could write down the 37 presidents in a list. Then she could take the lists the students prepared, put the lists together, and see who got what. This I am sure she was capable of doing, and she was doing it because she was operating under the measurement principle. She was told, or she had some kind of a strong feeling in herself if she weren't told, that you have to rank students. You can't give them all good grades or all bad grades; you have to spread them out. Giving this kind of test is one way you can spread them out very well—some students will learn 10 presidents;

some will learn 37. In my son's class, I'm sure some students were 10-37, some were 20-37, some were 37-37. Therefore, they could be *graded*, because those are numbers and numbers are very sacred in our society. When we convert everything to a number, we think we really know something. What we ought to know is that we have converted to something we can neither understand nor use for any intelligent educational purpose. Knowing more or fewer presidents has nothing to do with history or education. Students are tested on such an item for one purpose—to rank grade them. It would have been just as meaningful to grade them by their height or weight.

We measure far too much, and this is another unfortunate gift from my profession. Don't let yourself be overwhelmed with the value of measuring instruments in education. They may have some value in building widgets for General Motors, but they don't have much value in education. And it's not important to measure students against one another. What's important is to get them thinking and to come up with thoughtful alternative answers to difficult or even easy problems. One of the reasons thinking has gone out of style is because you can't measure it. We are so imbued with measurement and certainty that we have been willing to sacrifice thinking. Thinking is never certain—if it *were* certain, it couldn't be thinking.

Let me give you an example. It is about a test, and it was written up in a magazine. A student had a physics test in high school with one question, seemingly a pretty good question. He wrote an answer to it, and the teacher sent it back with an F on it—*failed*. The student was bitter. "You can't fail me," he said, "I had the right answer."

The test question was: How do you measure the height of a building with a barometer? The student had written, "Go to the top of the building, attach a string to the barometer, lower the barometer to the ground, and measure the length of the string." Not a bad answer—but the student flunked the test. The teacher said his answer was wrong, and the two argued back and forth. Finally the teacher said, "Let's go to the head of the science department and let him judge." The student said, "Fine. Whatever he says, I'll accept."

The head of the science department read the answer and said, "It's no good." The student was upset. The head of the science department saw that he was upset, so he said, "You sit down right now and see if you can write the answer. I'll give you another chance." The kid said, "Great!" He sat down, but he didn't write anything. Finally the head of the science department said, "You're not writing anything. Why not?"

"Well," the student said, "I don't know what to write; I have so many answers. Can I give them orally?"

The science chairman agreed to this, so the student said, "Well, you want a physical principle, I assume. You didn't like measurement."

"Yes."

"Well, you take the barometer to the top of the building. You hold it over the edge. You look at your watch, and once the second hand gets to twelve, you drop the barometer. Then you check the seconds until it smashes into the ground, and, using the acceleration formula, you figure the height of the building."

"No good. Try again."

"All right. How about proportion? You take the barometer; you set it up on the ground like this; you measure its shadow and the height of it; you measure the shadow of the building, and you figure the height of the building."

Again the professor said, "No good."

This time the student said, "How about logic?"

"Logic sounds good. Give me a logical answer."

And the student said, "You take the barometer; you go around to the base-

ment of the building; you knock on the door of the janitor. You say to the janitor, 'I'll give you this beautiful barometer if you'll tell me the height of the building.' "

The story may be apocryphal, but it makes the point. There is no one good, right answer to any question.

Now I'd like to discuss what I consider to be the five educational mediocrities that are related to the general principles of memorization, certainty, and measurement—principles that are causing students to follow failure pathways. One of these is the reporting system. The first thing that we have to do is get rid of the A-B-C-D-E-F report card. This is going to be hard to do, but we are doing it in selected elementary schools in the City of Los Angeles. Many administrators have been troubled by regular report cards, and they have been looking for a way to do away with them. We are helping them to provide a structure to do it with the so-called model schools that our Educator Training Center* is involved with. A-B-C-D-E-F grades are destructive, for all the reasons you know, and I won't insult your intelligence by going through all of them. Basically, the only passing grades are A and B; every other grade is a failing grade, unless you have such an enlightened and communicative school that everybody accepts C as a good grade. It's not a good grade in most places, and this is verified by older brothers in college and every place else. Nobody wants a C student; he's a dud. If a student gets a D or an F, he's even more of a dud.

The system I'm advocating in elementary school is based on the philosophy that you don't fail anybody.

Instead of having report cards, you should do the best you can during the six years you have the children in elementary school. As long as you have

*Funded by the W. Clement and Jessie V. Stone Foundation to reduce failure. The Center is located at 2140 West Olympic Boulevard, Los Angeles, California.

them in one class with essentially one teacher, this will work. When you get into separating classes, you have to use another system, which is equally good but different. But get rid of the A-B-C-D-E-F grades, and give the child a personal evaluation from the teacher. You may try another method, but this is what I personally advocate. The teacher and the student should sit down at least once or twice during a semester, and the teacher should say to the student: "This is where you are doing well; this is where you need to improve. What are the problems? Let's work out some ways for you to improve." A personal discussion between teacher and student is important; it's important whatever the age of the student. The teacher levels with the child and does it constructively. He doesn't say, "You are a failure."

I also advocate that at least once during a semester you invite a parent to sit in on this discussion as a passive, listening participant; and maybe later as a questioning, helping kind of participant. But the basic contract is between the student and the teacher. Teaching children is the school's responsibility. Too many little children think that what they are doing in school is for their parents, and that's a very destructive kind of idea to get into their minds.

Before you can successfully get rid of report cards, you have to convince the parents that this is a wise move. In one of our schools in Los Angeles recently, we had a big PTA meeting on this subject. We brought in a group of sixth graders, and I had a discussion with them to try to show the parents how destructive the A-B-C-D-E-F grades are. The parents were really appreciative of the chance to get rid of report cards. In fact, it was only the kids who were hanging on to report cards, and they were hanging on to them because they knew nothing else. But the parents began to see the destructiveness of the grading system, just by the way their children were talking.

We've told every parent in every school that if he wants a report card, he can have it. We're not fighting anybody; we're not going to ruin our whole procedure for one stubborn parent. Let him have the report card. But his child is not going to take it home; we don't believe in that. We'll mail it to the parent. It's his need; he can have it! And then if he wants to discuss it with his child, that's his option. But we are advocating teacher-child discussion, with the parents invited. It has worked, and it will work. It's hard to do; it takes a little technique; and you have to go slowly. Don't just suddenly start at your school. Go slowly and carefully, maybe starting at the lower grades. But if we don't get rid of this grading system, we'll continue to lock children in failure. You can't tell a child he's succeeding when you use a report card that labels him a failure. It won't work.

The next thing we have to get rid of is the normal curve. It's abnormal, and it shouldn't be used. The only time a normal curve should be used in any kind of grading system is when the teacher is absolutely certain he's taught nothing. Then he still has a normal distribution. But the object of education is to skew the norm. If you still have a norm after you've taught all semester, you've done one of two things, either of which is almost impossible: You've taught nothing, or you've taught every single person exactly the same amount. The idea of the normal curve is ridiculous. In life we don't go on normal curves; we go on proficiency. School should be related to the way life is. That's why it's so important to get rid of the ridiculous concept of the normal curve that has been foisted on us by statisticians who don't know what they are doing when they start using the normal curve in education.

The third thing we have to get rid of is the objective test for personal evaluation purposes. Objective tests are killers of kids. They lock children into the

memorization, certainty, measurement pattern. Tests that require memorization are deeply ingrained and hard to get rid of. But how wonderful it is when you do get rid of a few! We have to learn to use subjective tests where children can thoughtfully express their opinions and their ideas about what's going on within the subject area. Children should be taught how to look up information and how to think about it and what it means. Memorization is not the answer. Don't require children to memorize anything. Your tests will have to be shorter, but you can teach children to *write*. We are trying to develop skills—the skill of reading, the skill of listening, the skill of writing thoughtfully and reasonably, the skill of speaking thoughtfully and reasonably, and the skill of understanding some basic arithmetic processes. Memorized knowledge is chancy. It will go *along with* the teaching of skills, but skills are what will pay off in the real world the child has to live in.

The fourth thing, is *no closed book tests*. Let the books be open. That's what they are written for. Keep them open at all times. That totally eliminates cheating. Many students learn to cheat, even in elementary school, in order to cope with the present testing and grading system and in order to overcome the pressure to give their parents a good report. In a sense, we sow the seeds of our own society's destruction by teaching little kids that cheating pays off. Under my system, there could be no cheating. There's no failure; there's no evaluation in terms of "you are low." Instead, there's "let's work for something"; "let's see how you are doing"; "let's set high standards and try to meet them, but there's no sense cheating because you are not graded against Johnny or Billy or Suzy; you're graded against yourself and what you can do."

The fifth thing is this: Be very, very careful about homework. Homework is a good thing. Probably in the later grades of elementary school, it should be incorporated into the system. However, it should be done very carefully and thoughtfully, and it should involve the things the child can do. Don't give the homework to the parents; the parents aren't in elementary school anymore. They don't understand this new math anyway. You're torturing them to death, not to mention what you are doing to the kids.

Homework has to be thoughtful. It has to be something the child can do. A lot of homework should involve the child in dialogues with his family. Children don't talk enough with their parents in a meaningful, constructive way. Too much antagonistic dialogue goes on. Send a child home with an assignment to ask his father what his first job was like and to report back to the class on that. Or what was it like to live without television? When did Dad get his first dog? Where did mother live, and what was the neighborhood like when she was growing up? Give this kind of homework assignment. Parents love to talk about such things to their kids. If you give this as a homework assignment, the child will listen, and this will do a lot of good for the parent. It will bring about happiness in the family instead of the antagonism and fighting that accompanies many homework assignments. I think excessive and unreasonable homework is responsible for much of the friction in homes with teen-agers. Teen-agers aren't your immediate problem, but the elementary schools can set the stage for reasonable and rational homework. And we should try to impress on the secondary schools that they ought to go in this direction, also.

These are the things I wanted to say to you. I've talked for a long time, but I don't often get a chance to talk to so many principals, and I appreciate your listening to me this long. I suggest for details you read my books, *Reality Therapy* and *Schools Without Failure*. This is a suggestion, not a required homework assignment!